



# 1994 CJCS STRATEGY ESSAY WRITING CONTEST ENTRY

## ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

**TITLE:** All The World's A Stage

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The relationship between government officials and the media has always been characterized by interdependence and often by a healthy antagonism. From the military perspective, control of information is the issue. Technological developments, which include portable satellite dishes, make control harder to impose. Bound by constitutional guarantees for freedom of the press, the Freedom of Information Act, and their responsibility to keep the public informed, government and military officials find themselves frustrated and often powerless to control information. It may be time for a new look at the viability and practicality of military press pools and other techniques for information control in an era of instantaneous broadcasting.

## THE KILLINGS

It was another miserable day in Sudan, my 80th day in country. The little thermometer my wife gave me last Christmas read 97 degrees when the heat woke me at 0555. It's just as well I was awake; my alarm was set for 0600 so I'd have time for a quick shower and breakfast before my 0700 shift. I grabbed a towel and headed to the shower area. No hot water again, but it didn't really matter in the heat. By the time I got my BDU pants on I'd already sweated through my T-shirt; it makes me wonder why I even bother with showers anymore.

At the mess tent I tried to choke down some eggs with coffee, but wasn't really hungry. I've lost 11 pounds so far; seems like all I do is drink water and sweat 24 hours a day. After three bites I pushed my food aside and took my time with a cigarette and coffee. Butch and Little Mike wandered over and sat down, and we tried to guess the final score of the Oriole's game yesterday. If we're lucky, we'll hear it over AFRTS later today. Finally we headed over to the MP compound.

Little Mike and I were immediately sent out in a jeep to bring in two guys on the current shift; apparently some bug had gotten to them and they were sick. We headed to the east side of Khartoum, an area I've been to more times than I care to remember. It's a slum, but then, the whole city looks like a slum to me. The one thing that makes it different from the rest of Khartoum is the huge, steaming dump that is the northern border of the district. You can smell the dump everywhere on the east side, and from several blocks away you can see the steam rising like smoke from the rotting garbage. The worst thing for me is seeing the people who actually live in the dump, the little kids and old people who spend their days digging in the piles of trash searching for glass, rags and metal. I've seen rats bigger than dogs there.

One thing about that dump, though. It makes me feel like I never really appreciated how good Americans have it. These people will never have a chance at a better life, and

you can see it in their eyes. Even the kids have tired eyes; eyes without that spark that makes them seem alive. On the other hand, I've had lots of chances but I haven't done a whole hell of a lot with them. I was so busy having fun in high school I barely graduated. Mary Jo and I got married that July, just two months before Tommy Jr. was born. I couldn't support her; couldn't pay the hospital bills for the birth, so I joined the Army. Look what that's gotten me.

I've been in almost a year and a half now, and have been gone so much that Tommy hardly knows me. After MP training at Ft Gordon, I was sent to Somalia for a five-month hitch in Mogadishu. I thought nothing could be worse; boy, was I wrong. My buds and I thought the US learned its lesson in Somalia, and were really surprised when the decision was made to assist with UN operations in Sudan. Lots of us with experience, including Little Mike Lyttle, who I'd met in Somalia, were told we'd be here for as long as six months to "stabilize the situation and protect the convoys of relief goods."

What that translates to is we spend our days patrolling Khartoum, watching for snipers and making sure things stay peaceful. And what that really means is we're all bored out of our minds, counting the days until we can get back to "the world" and our real lives. After what I've seen over here, I want to get serious about my life. I plan to start taking night courses. Maybe in a few years, after I get a degree, I can earn a commission. We'll see. Mary Jo and Tommy deserve a better life, but it all seems so far away right now. Meanwhile, back to the real world.

Little Mike and I drove through the dusty streets which were full of crowds, even this early. The people we passed glared at us, like usual. I can't figure out why the adults seem to dislike us so much; guess no one likes to admit they have to accept handouts. They probably also resent us because we're from America and from what I've seen so far, everyone overseas seems to hate Americans. It's only the kids who smile at us and talk to us, because they're looking for handouts. Little Mike and I always put jawbreakers in our pockets for the kids. Today, though, even the kids weren't smiling.

I kept getting the feeling something was wrong. In fact, I had just turned toward Mike to ask him if he felt like something funny was going on when I heard the gun blast. Mike fell forward onto the steering wheel. I lifted up his head, saw the mess the sniper had made of his face and grabbed the radio. It was already too late; another guy had come up beside me while I bent over Mike. He tore off my helmet and when he hit me in the back of the head, my world went black.

The three men worked with quiet efficiency. They pulled the two bodies out of the jeep and loaded them onto a wooden cart. They covered the soldiers with a filthy blanket before piling on some oily rags and loose newspapers. Then they pushed the cart through several back streets to the edge of the dump.

Two others waited for them. They had erected a crude scaffold of wood and scrap metal, with a platform about four feet high. Their women had braided a rope from strips of fabric torn from a large American flag, and the men used the homemade rope to construct a noose. The first three men unloaded the rags and newspapers and threw the blanket aside. Then they carried PFC Tom Cassidy up the crude steps of the scaffold, fastened the noose around his neck, and lifted him over the side of the platform. They dropped him. Although he was unconscious, Cassidy was alive until the snap of the rope and the weight of his body broke his neck. The momentum caused his body to swing monotonously back and forth in ever-smaller arcs until it finally came to a stop.

Meanwhile, the first three men hauled PFC Mike Lytle to the bottom of the scaffold, partially dragging his 227 pounds through the dust. They tore his helmet off and propped him up in a sitting position with what was left of his face pointed up at Cassidy. Another American flag was draped across his chest and all five men took turns urinating on it to show their contempt, and to draw flies even quicker. After a final look at the tableau, the men vanished into the city.

## **THE REPORTER**

Bob Mallory, WNN reporter, dumped two spoons full of sugar into his cup and idly stirred the oily coffee in front of him. He had spent the last 15 minutes at the Paradise Bar watching a dog sleep while the proprietress prepared the boiling water to make his Sanka. Everyone needs a routine, he decided, so he had taken to spending his early mornings here with his cameraman, Bernie Kemp, waiting for something to happen. At least this routine wouldn't interfere with the afternoon press briefings at the military headquarters. Most of the reporters preferred hanging around the Army's air-conditioned tent, drinking coffee supplied by the Army and piling up UN and military press releases no one ever read.

But the Paradise Bar was becoming a home away from home to Bernie and Bob. After all, they closed the place down almost every night, so why not open it up each morning? Bernie was snoring on a cot in the rear of the bar, and Bob continued to watch the dog scratch and whine in his sleep while he wondered what the heck a dog in Sudan had to dream about. Mallory was just nodding off to sleep with his head in his hands when the front door banged open and a kid about eight years old ran in. He said, "Mister, come quick. Bring camera." Still nursing faint hopes that he would actually some day come up with a story that would get him noticed, Bob shook Bernie awake. Bernie grabbed his camera, Bob his notepad and off they went.

The kid refused to say more but they followed him at a fast clip through the muggy heat. After a few blocks they were dripping with sweat but they continued, even though the kid was at least half a block ahead of them and gaining with every step. Finally the stench of rotting garbage became almost overpowering, and the kid stopped and pointed toward the dump. They saw it then, the scaffold with the still figure in an Army uniform dangling from a red, white and blue rope. Another obviously dead Army soldier missing part of his face was at the scaffold's bottom, the body posed to gaze up at the dangling man with sightless eyes. A fly-covered American flag was draped over his chest and a huge cluster of flies swarmed around him.

They walked closer and Bernie threw up. Bob lost it, too, when he took a good look at Little Mike. Then Bernie grew businesslike and took the lens cap off the camera. He walked back to where they had first seen the bodies and shot from a distance, walking closer and getting detailed video of the entire scene. Meanwhile, Bob feverishly scribbled a rough script on his notepad, and when Bernie was finished he filmed Bob just off to the side of the scaffold. Bob described the heat, the time of day, and the stench of the dump before he began describing the horrific scene beside him.

When they were finished, Bob told Bernie to send the video via satellite back to WNN headquarters in Richmond, Virginia. At that moment, a US Army armored personnel carrier (APC) pulled up. Bernie eased back, separating himself from the scene while the stunned soldiers took it in, a moment of silence preceding their reactions. Bernie used the opportunity to walk slowly to the corner. He began running as soon as he turned the corner and was out of sight.

Six of the soldiers climbed out of the APC and walked towards the bodies. One of the six, PFC Butch Rydell, felt white-hot anger surge through his veins as he recognized the dead men...anger at whoever had done this...anger which made him want to lash out. Tom and Little Mike were his friends, men he had shared a cigarette with a short time before when they walked together to MP headquarters.

PFC Rydell walked over to Bob, roughly grabbed him by the back of his collar and snarled, "You vulture."

Bob said, "Calm down, now. I know this isn't easy on you."

"I can't believe you're using my friends to make a buck. Maybe you oughta join them," said Rydell. He roughly shoved Bob face first into the dirt and planted a boot in the small of his back so he couldn't turn. Then he unsheathed his M-16, held it against the back of Bob's neck and fired. From the damage, it was obvious to all that Bob was dead.

As soon as the sound quit bouncing off the mountains of trash nearby, Butch fell to his knees sobbing, "You bastard, you bastard. They're all bastards."



It had all happened so quickly none of the others had time to react. They now watched Butch in stunned silence. Seconds later, two more APCs pulled up and heavily armed squads jumped out. A captain who had just arrived took in the scene with a glance and asked, "All right, what happened here?"

No one spoke. Butch's sobs continued, growing softer like a sleepy child's. His gun lay in the dust beside him.

#### THE VIDEO

Bernie ran as fast as he could carrying the bulky camera. He was several blocks away when he heard the single shot, and assumed the soldiers had tracked down one of the killers. He hot-footed it back to the Coral Sea, the motel all the journalists favored because it promised one fan per room. The trouble was, the electricity rarely came on so the fans were useless most of the time.

Bernie hurried to the back parking lot where the leased van was parked. He quickly assembled the portable satellite dish, established connections and transmitted the video. Just as he finished, an Army jeep pulled up. An MP barked, "Halt, you're under arrest. Put your hands up," and Bernie faced the jeep with his hands in the air, backing away from the satellite dish.

"Where's the videotape?" asked one soldier.

"In the machine," Bernie responded.

"Pull it out and bring it with you. We're going to take a ride," said one of the two soldiers walking toward him with guns drawn. Bernie retrieved the video, grabbed his camera, protested that his satellite dish would be stolen and got in the jeep. One soldier remained behind to guard the equipment.

#### THE NEWSROOM

Within minutes the video had been received in Richmond and sent on to WNN's international news desk, which was thinly manned in the early morning. Three of the staff members were standing up discussing the veracity of the London tabloids' latest scoop; the

supposed pregnancy of Lady Di, the Princess of Wales. Suddenly Joni Tonelli, one of the three, caught her viewing screen out of the corner of her eye and raised her hand in silence. All three turned and saw the body of an American soldier hanging from a strange red, white and blue rope. A second American soldier with part of his face missing sat next to him on the ground, propped up so he seemed to be looking at his buddy. Swarms of flies blackened his face and the flag on his chest.

Then Bob Mallory's strained, tired and sweaty face filled the screen, and his measured voice described the hot day, the desolate setting and the scene next to him. After signing off, he had Bernie keep the camera on. He then looked full-face at the camera and said, "I'm speaking to the WNN editorial staff. As far as we can tell, these murders just occurred and the US Army doesn't know about them. We seem to be the first people on the scene." The screen went blank.

"Holy shit, we've got a scoop on our hands, and what a scoop," said Lou McCoy.

"Hold your horses," said Herb Davenport, the last of the three. "We've got the Department of Defense to contend with."

Both turned to Joni, the desk supervisor, "I suggest we get a copy of this to the head shed pronto so they know what we're working on," said Joni. "Herb, you take care of that. Lou, I want you to start digging; we need to put together a larger piece on the operation in Sudan. We'll need statements from the UN, the military and the administration. We'll need a list of people to interview. Get me anything you can on the families. Herb can help as soon as he gets copies made of the tape. Get extra help from the domestic desk. Meanwhile, I'll see what I can get from the Pentagon."

## THE PENTAGON

Joni called the number for the Pentagon's National Military Command Center (NMCC) and was put through to the on-call duty officer for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (OASD/PA). A groggy Air Force Major Kelly Whitehead

answered the telephone. Joni thanked her lucky stars that it was Whitehead, the same officer she had worked with early in 1994 to obtain information about a female American soldier who was raped and murdered by relief workers in Bosnia. The story ended up being an embarrassment to the UN. Joni had no doubt the story they would air later that day would be even touchier, because the public was already questioning the President's decision to send troops to Sudan.

"Hi, Major Whitehead. This is Joni Tonelli, WNN." Sitting up in bed to try to shake off the sleep which threatened to engulf her again, Whitehead reached for her notepad and pen and said, "Yes, ma'am. What can I do for you?"

"We just received video from Sudan showing two dead American soldiers. One was hung and the other appears to have been shot. Our reporter and cameraman apparently were the first to arrive at the scene. They taped the victims and sent a piece back which we'd like to edit and run as soon as possible. I know you have to notify the families before we run anything and frankly, we weren't even sure the military was aware of the murders."

"Hold on, Miss Tonelli. Slow down, I need to take some notes. Is there any way we can see this video?" asked Whitehead.

"I need to talk to my superiors about releasing a copy to you. Ordinarily we wouldn't consider it but I'll see what I can find out," said Joni. "Meanwhile, I need any information you can give me about what happened in Sudan and what the military response will be."

"I'll start checking into it right away and get back to you as soon as possible. Thanks for calling me on this," said the major. "Let me get your phone number."

The NMCC was monitoring the conversation and immediately called back the major when the reporter hung up. "Major," said Chief Master Sergeant David Burbridge, "we haven't been notified of any incidents in Sudan in the past few hours. But you can bet your bottom dollar we're checking into it. Don't return that reporter's call until you check back with us."

"I won't," promised Whitehead. "Meanwhile, I need to start putting some information together for my chain of command. Chief, could you connect me with the Army's on-call PIO?"

"Sure thing," said Burbridge.

The phone was answered on its second ring by a crisp-sounding but very young voice. "Captain Lawrence," said the officer.

"Captain Lawrence, this is the DoD/PA duty officer, Major Whitehead. I just received a call from Joni Tonelli at WNN's international desk. They just got some satellite video from Sudan showing two soldiers who have been murdered. One was hung and the other apparently shot. They'd like to air the edited video as soon as possible but they don't think we know about the incident, much less that we have notified the families. Naturally, they'd like all the information we can give them."

"Well, I sure don't know anything about it, so I suspect it hasn't been reported up through channels yet. Let me do some checking. I'll get back with you," said Lawrence.

"Call me back through the NMCC, and if you don't get an answer, I'm en route to the office. You know that number. I need to make another call here and then get myself together and head into the Pentagon. I should be there within an hour, and I suspect I'll probably see you there," the major said.

"Yeah, I have a feeling neither one of us will be getting any more sleep tonight," commented Lawrence ruefully.

"One last thing. Remember, the CINCENT PAO is the spokesman for the US military troops involved in this UN operation, and the news release will be made by my office. You can't release any information on this incident through Army channels," cautioned Whitehead.

"Gotcha," said Lawrence. "See you in the building." Whitehead hung up and carefully dialed her boss' number; it wouldn't do to misdial and wake up any more people than this episode was already waking up.

"Hello," said a sleepy woman.

"Elaine, this is Major Kelly Whitehead. I need to speak to your husband, please."

Kelly heard sleepy muttering near the phone and then her boss, Colonel Jay Radov, came on the line. "Hi, Kelly, what's up?" he asked, sounding as fresh and chipper as he did every day.

Kelly gave him a rundown and he let out a long, low whistle. "So, I recommend we let the ASD know," Whitehead concluded.

"I agree. I'll wake up Mr Stellmon and let him know it's gonna be a long day. Meanwhile you grab a quick shower and head on in to the office. I'll see you there as soon as I can get in from Reston," Radov concluded.

By the time Kelly showered, put on her uniform and drove in from Arlington, only 37 minutes had elapsed -- a personal record, she observed. She unlocked the office, flung her duty officer's briefcase on the desk and headed to the NMCC. At the door she asked for Chief Burbidge.

"Hi, Chief. What have you found out about the incident in Sudan?"

"It's worse than we thought, Major. An Army squad came on the scene just as the WNN crew finished filming. One of the soldiers in the backup team, PFC Butch Rydell, was a friend of both victims. He shot and killed the reporter. Rydell has been sedated and is in the Army infirmary under armed guard. The reporter, Bob Mallory, is dead, and WNN doesn't know about his death. The cameraman, Bernie Kemp, is in Army custody but as you know, the video had already been sent back to WNN. Kemp doesn't know what's happened to Mallory and he's making all kinds of threats and accusations." The chief paused to catch his breath.

"That's the fifth reporter who's died this year covering UN military operations," reflected the major. "Is that all, Chief?" she asked, thinking it couldn't possibly get worse.

"Well, no," continued the chief. "It seems Private Rydell really started something. As you know, there've been hard feelings between soldiers and reporters for years; ever since

Vietnam. But it's been worse since last year, when the media filmed Somalis dragging the nude body of an American GI through the dirt and then ran the video during prime time. That's bad enough, but apparently the soldiers who are in Sudan now feel the US wouldn't even be there if the media hadn't stirred up the administration...just like they did for Somalia.<sup>1</sup>

"Come on, Chief. You know that isn't true," said Whitehead.

"It doesn't matter, Major," continued the chief. "People believe what they want to believe. Anyway, some of the soldiers in Rydell's unit roughed up reporters as they left their motel in Khartoum this morning. The soldiers were filmed by ABC and CBS beating journalists, and that video has been sent back to the states. The media are calling the SECDEF asking what gives.

"And one last thing. The Army is waiting until first light to notify Private Cassidy's wife and Private Lyttle's parents," the chief concluded.

Whitehead took it all in and walked back to her office with a thousand thoughts running through her mind. As she opened the door, she saw both Captain Lawrence and Colonel Radov waiting near her desk. She ran through the scenario for them and snapped on the television while she was talking. Her words trickled away as she gaped at the scene. ABC's Sudan correspondent was on the air, filming from the top of the Coral Sea Motel. Below, soldiers brutally kicked a man on the ground while another man in civilian clothes lay nearby, apparently unconscious.

The ringing telephones broke the spell in the media relations office. Radov picked up one line, snapped out a terse, "Yes, sir," listened another minute and said, "Let me put Major Whitehead on the phone. She'll give you a rundown on the situation, sir." Radov covered the receiver and mouthed to Kelly, "It's Stellmon."

Kelly recited to the Defense Department's senior public affairs official everything she had learned since arriving at the Pentagon. Stellmon listened silently and said when she was finished, "I've got to get back to SECDEF. He just got a wake-up call from the

White House and wants to know what the hell's going on. I'll see you and your boss in the office shortly."

Captain Lawrence then gave Whitehead and Radov a quick rundown on information he had obtained through Army channels. He provided details about the murdered men, their ages, job titles, days in country, hometowns and other information which would be needed for the press release. He described the scene where the men were killed and also described the murder of the reporter based on eyewitness accounts.

The jangling telephone on Whitehead's desk commanded attention just as Lawrence was finishing. Kelly punched the button and said, "DoD Press Desk, Major Whitehead."

"Major, it's Joni Tonelli again. What are you guys trying to cover up in Sudan? We're watching ABC and CBS reports of reporters being attacked by soldiers. We want some answers and we want them now. We've also been unable to reach Bob Mallory and Bernie Kemp. Does the military have anything to do with the fact that we can't reach them?"

"Ms Tonelli, I'm still sorting out exactly what's going on. I should have something for you soon. I can tell you that the next of kin of the two dead soldiers you have on video have not yet been notified, so I can't give you any information on them. I'll get back to you shortly," said Whitehead.

Kelly hung up in exasperation. Other telephone lines were ringing throughout the press office. She turned to Radov and said, "We've got to let WNN know about Bob Mallory's death so they can notify his family. We've also got to get the military families notified ASAP, because that video may be run sooner than we'd like. I wouldn't be surprised if WNN gets angry enough to run the video without our OK if we don't get back to them soon."

#### **THE WIDOW**

It was the coldest, stillest, darkest time of night -- those moments just before dawn. Mary Jo Cassidy had just laid back down on the double bed in the back end of the trailer where she and Tommy Jr. lived. Tommy had slept fitfully all night, and his cries woke her

again early this morning. She soothed him back to sleep, wondering at the nightmares he seemed to be having; bad dreams which had just started in the past two weeks.

She hadn't been sleeping well herself. Part of it was missing Tom. He sounded so lonely and disillusioned in his letters; he seemed even sadder than he had been in Somalia. Well, I guess there's only so much poverty, so much heat, so much boredom and so much resentment people can take, she thought. The newness of the Army and of being part of a UN operation had worn off soon enough in Somalia. Tom was definitely not excited when he was notified about his Sudan tour.

Mary Jo thought ahead to the upcoming talk they would have this weekend, the twice-a-month call the military allowed the soldiers to make to their families. It was awkward because they had to remember to say "over" each time they were finished and it was time for the other person to talk. Mary Jo frequently forgot to say "over," and the operator and Tom got confused. The talks also frustrated her because she felt they weren't real communication, any more than letters were real communication. She needed to see her husband, to hold his hand, and to be close to him to really communicate.

They had changed a lot since their marriage. Neither of them had been really ready to settle down at first even though they were sure they loved each other. But Tommy Jr. changed things. The baby gave her life a meaning and a purpose she had never known. And Tom seemed to mature as well. He talked more about the future, a future for the three of them together. She wanted to go back to school when Tommy was a little older, and Tom said he would do all he could to make sure they could afford it. It would be tough with both of them taking classes, but Tom was contributing part of his salary now to the Army's educational program fund which would pay for his college degree.

Mary Jo just wanted things to be normal, normal like they had never been. To her, normal would be having her husband back and waking up next to him each morning. Normal would be growing up together and growing old together.



Her thoughts were interrupted by the crunch of car tires on gravel. The car had turned off the main drive of the trailer court and pulled into the lane outside her window. Three car doors slammed. Strange, thought Mary Jo, for 6 a.m. And then there was a knock on the rickety aluminum door of the trailer.

She got up and put on the faded rose-colored terry cloth robe and slippers she had worn since eighth grade. Tommy woke again and started to fuss, but quickly fell silent when she told him to hush. She opened the door to three people in uniform; a solemn-looking major, a chaplain who looked at her kindly and a young-looking nurse. As she looked from face to face, she knew.

She pulled her robe tighter and was unaware that tears had begun to trickle down her cheeks. "Is it Tom?" she asked, afraid to hear the answer, the answer that would make it all real.

#### THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Secretary of Defense Joseph Anthony was not having a good day. He straightened the knot in his tie and pulled back his shoulders before walking out of the men's room just down the hall from the Oval Office. He paced while waiting for the Chairman, General Pat Montgomery, who was en route from his quarters at Fort Meyers. Once Montgomery arrived, they would be ushered in to see the President. Anthony reviewed the morning's events in his mind.

So far, the families of the two dead soldiers had been notified. He had personally called the president of the World News Network, Camille Glenn, to notify her of the death of Bob Mallory and to apologize for the delay in notifying her. He also ordered Bernie Kemp released from Army custody and directed that the video he shot with Bob Mallory be returned to him. Anthony apologized to Glenn for Bernie's detention. He also gave Glenn the go-ahead for the release of edited video of the two dead soldiers, although neither he nor anyone on his staff had seen the footage. After all, the only video DoD had a right to censor would have to affect national security, and this didn't fill the bill.<sup>2</sup> Just

because a media product was a political bombshell or negatively affected America's image had nothing to do with the censorship issue, he reflected wryly.

The army commander in Sudan, Major General Ralph Langer, seemed to have things back under control. Fourteen men were in the brig in Khartoum; one for the murder of Bob Mallory and thirteen for the attacks on journalists at the Coral Sea Motel. The injured journalists were being treated by Army doctors; most injuries were minor. General Langer had given the press corps in Sudan the statement about the day's events which had been coordinated in Washington and responded to questions fired at him by the reporters.

Anthony's thoughts came to an abrupt halt as General Montgomery whipped around the curve of the hallway, his wiry six-foot-five-inch frame in continual motion. As usual, he was without the cadre of aides and assistants who usually accompanied the military's elite. "Mr Secretary," he said warmly, gripping Anthony's hand.

"Morning, Pat, good to see you," said the defense secretary. Carla, the President's personal secretary, heard General Montgomery's voice and stepped into the hallway. "The President is waiting," she said, ushering them into the Oval Office.

President Hardy sat behind his desk and did not rise to meet them as he normally did for all visitors. That's not a good sign, thought Anthony.

"Sit down," said the President. Anthony and Montgomery sat in the two chairs facing the President's desk. Hardy started in with no preliminaries. "I don't mind telling you how much I dislike waking up to television footage that is filled with surprises. I guess it's too much to hope that the Defense Department would have the courtesy to let me know as soon as the US Army decides to disrupt a UN operation which has been peaceful up to now."

"Sir, if I may," spoke up Anthony. "The information about the incidents in Sudan was working its way up through the chain of command to us. Unfortunately, the media's satellite technology beat us to the punch.<sup>3</sup> We know we have a problem in the timeliness of our information, and I apologize for the breakdown."

"Well, fix it," snapped President Hardy. "We look like idiots who not only don't know what's going on during military operations; we can't control our own troops! A soldier murdering a reporter is bad enough. But who allowed those men to rough up reporters in front of television cameras? The UN is no longer even sure it wants our troops in Sudan, and the media have made us look like rabble-rousing incompetents with no discipline."

"Sir," said General Montgomery, "We..."

"I don't want any excuses," the President said. "This television coverage is going to hurt my administration. You're tearing down a lot of bridges I worked hard to build in the international community. I want to know how you can get information to me faster so I'm not always two steps behind. And I want to know how you plan to get better control over the media so they don't beat us to the punch all the time. Both of you get back to me as soon as you've figured out how to fix this."

With that, President Hardy glared icily at both men, rose and abruptly left the room. Anthony and Montgomery followed.

#### THE PENTAGON

Assistant Secretary of Defense Larry Stellmon peered over the tops of his bifocals at the group arrayed around his conference table. Colonel Jay Radov and Major Kelly Whitehead from his Defense Information Division; Colonel Mike Murrow and Lieutenant Colonel Dave Gillette from his Plans Division; and his executive assistant, Colonel Randy Morgan, looked expectantly at him. Stellmon's orders from his boss, Joseph Anthony, had been clear. "I want you to put together a briefing for me explaining how we can get better control of defense-related information the media may have access to," Anthony said to Stellmon earlier that afternoon.

Stellmon explained the secretary's marching orders to the group. "I want this to be a freewheeling discussion session so we can get our hands around the problem and decide which areas to get into deeper. Let's start at the beginning, because we'll need to give Mr

Anthony some history about the relationship between the military and the media. Mike, didn't you write your master's thesis on that subject?"

"Yes, sir," spoke up Murrow. "I don't think we need to spend a lot of time on this, but we need to go back at least as far as Vietnam. That's where the real antagonism between the media and the military started. Most military people seem to feel we lost in Vietnam because television brought the war into people's living rooms.<sup>4</sup> This belief has been passed on to each new generation of soldiers, sailors and airmen, many of whom think members of the press can't keep secrets and would willingly endanger American lives to get a story.

"The Vietnam War and Watergate also played roles in intensifying the media's mistrust of the government, including the military.<sup>5</sup> It's become a self-perpetuating type of relationship. The antagonism ebbs and flows, but it seems to be at a high point again now. It's all a question of power and control; who has the information the media need to do their jobs, which government agencies or operations will be affected by release of that information, and what restrictions, if any, should the government put on the release or use of information."

"Do you want to add anything, Dave?" Murrow asked, turning to his deputy.

"Sure," said Gillette. "The military's relationship with the media has been complicated by technological developments in recent years. First, the media are more mobile than they were in the past. They're willing to go anywhere to cover a story, and satellite technology makes the transmission of stories instantaneous from anywhere in the world.<sup>6</sup> That can sure impact on military operations."

"We saw that during the Gulf War," broke in Radov. "Remember when we had to point out to ABC that their news coverage of SCUDS landing in Israel was actually helping Iraqi spotters and endangering innocent people? The media didn't have a clue they were acting irresponsibly."<sup>7</sup>

Whitehead broke in. "Another side of this issue has to do with press pools. Satellites give the media the ability to operate outside DoD pools on the battlefield and still get the story. The media no longer need to rely on us for help in transmitting the story, so it's almost impossible for us to control what is printed or aired about military operations. We saw this in the Gulf War, too. For example, toward the end of the ground war, major US news networks broke away from military pools and beat our troops into Kuwait City. They were broadcasting live via satellite back to the US before the first American soldiers arrived on the scene."<sup>8</sup>

"Refresh my memory on the pool concept," Stellmon broke in. "How did DoD decide pools were the best way to control the media?"

"Pools were an outgrowth of Grenada, back in 1983," said Morgan. "That was the last time the military was successful in keeping the press out of a military operation altogether. Reporters were barred from the island in the early days of the fighting, before we had complete control of the island. The outcry from the media is the reason we have media pools today."<sup>9</sup>

"But we may want to revisit the whole idea of press pools now," said Murrow. "Their success is arguable. We had successful practice deployments of the official pool for several years after Grenada,<sup>10</sup> but the first big test was Operation Just Cause in December 1989, and it was a partial failure. The press pool we sent to Panama not only missed the start of Just Cause by nearly five hours, but the military never provided the support we should have. No one was happy with the result."<sup>11</sup>

"I remember reading the post-mortem," said Stellmon. "The group convened by Secretary Cheney concluded that the Pentagon's concern for secrecy sabotaged the pool concept in Panama. It went on to say that unless DoD leaders are prepared to trust the media, the pool concept will not work."<sup>12</sup>

"I'm not sure trust is the real issue here," said Radov. "We have an obligation to work with the media to keep the public informed; all of us here today realize that. Trust is

almost immaterial. Thank goodness some of our senior commanders understand that. General Hoar hit the nail on the head recently when he said the military must pay attention to the media to sustain public support for military operations.<sup>13</sup> We need the media just as much as they need us. Look at how strong public support was during the Gulf War, partly because we worked so hard to tell our story through the media."

"Getting back to the issue of media pools, though, I'm not sure how we could handle the media logistically without pools," said Whitehead. "During World War II, General Eisenhower only had to contend with several dozen reporters who covered the whole European front.<sup>14</sup> If you look back to the Gulf War, we accredited 2,500 journalists through the Joint Information Bureau.<sup>15</sup> That's a heck of a crowd! Some reporters came for days, some for weeks, and others for the long haul. Just providing logistical support became a real challenge, and keeping that many people supplied with information was a major effort. We couldn't have controlled them without using pools unless we assigned a whole army of escorts to accompany reporters. I can't imagine another solution. Does anyone have a better idea?" she asked, looking around the table.

Silence greeted her question. "Well, it's an issue we've got to deal with," said Stellmon. "Media pools aren't giving us the control over information we need, and they may not be applicable to every situation the military gets involved in these days. The President certainly isn't satisfied. So, what's our next step?"

"We're not just talking about control over information, but control over events," Colonel Murrow said. "We still tend to be a little naive about the impact of news coverage on military operations, and it gets us into trouble. Otherwise, we wouldn't have suggested to the media that they may be interested in covering the landing of our SEALs on the beach in Somalia in 1992. We thought press coverage would enhance the image of the military forces, but when the television lights blinded our guys in night-vision goggles, the military looked foolish.<sup>16</sup> We did this to ourselves by encouraging media coverage and then failing to control it."

"But we've had some really successful operations where we did have more control," pointed out Whitehead. "For example, we made it easy for the press to cover Marine operations off the coast of Kuwait. Those stories helped convince Saddam's people that the main coalition attack would come from the wrong direction."<sup>17</sup>

"Yeah, but what the public seems to remember best of all is coverage that makes us look bad," said Morgan. "It can even force us to change our operations. General Schwarzkopf speculated in his book that if the administration hadn't been so concerned about the 'Highway of Death' looking like a turkey shoot on television, the war may not have ended so quickly."<sup>18</sup>

Stellmon broke in. "The real problem here is that the media and concerns about the impact of media coverage sometimes end up driving the train. That's what the President is unhappy about. Media coverage focuses the public on certain issues whether those issues are important to the administration or not."<sup>19</sup> Clearly, the President is not pleased with the negative focus on the Sudan operation, and he can't control the spin the media are giving things. That's why we're having this meeting."

"It seems to me that the media's clout keeps growing, in terms of putting pressure on the administration as to which issues the US will get involved in," observed Gillette.

"Television news is especially good at manipulating the public, but unfortunately, many people have also gotten really good at manipulating television."<sup>20</sup> For example, I've really been holding my breath about Bosnia-Herzegovina during the past two years, because all the feuding parties became so polished in manipulating the media that I was sure NATO would be driven to intervene."<sup>21</sup>

"Uh huh," said Whitehead. "Luckily, some people are a lot more heavy-handed about their manipulation of the media. Remember how hard the Iraqis tried to convince the world, through CNN, that their biological weapons production facility was a baby milk factory?"<sup>22</sup> And remember the Iraqi woman shaking her fist at the camera after we

bombed the command center in Baghdad and killed those civilians? It turned out she was an Iraqi ambassador."<sup>23</sup>

"But the point these incidents made," Morgan said, "is that the media have become a weapon or a tool to people, groups and countries. And they can be a very effective tool if they are properly used."

"Last year," said Murrow, "Boutros-Ghali warned that the media no longer simply report the news. He said television has become part of the events it covers and has changed the way the world reacts to crisis."<sup>24</sup>

"There's a lot of truth to that," said Gillette. "We've all seen countless examples of media coverage, by itself, turning events into news."<sup>25</sup> So it seems to me the issue here is control of coverage. How much control can we impose on the media in terms of which military events they cover and what information they have access to? And how much control can we expect to exert over foreign journalists who are already in place when we deploy to some remote location?"<sup>26</sup>

"Hold that thought until I leave, and then you all can kick these ideas around some more. This has been a productive discussion for me, but I've got another meeting to get to," said Stellmon. "We've covered a lot of issues in the past hour, but let me summarize 1

"We need a brief history of the relationship between the military and the media. Then I'd like something on the public's right to know versus the military's requirements. Get into censorship, military security, Freedom of Information Act considerations, and whether our 'rules' should change depending on the type of operation we're involved in: UN operations, coalition operations, etc.

"Then I'd like you to get into the issue of control; the evolution of press pools, whether pools are still the best way of controlling the media, and how technological advances make control more difficult. Then we come to the hard part. I want recommendations on whether and how the Defense Department can better control information and the media. Be sure to consider how we can beat the media in terms of timeliness of information



passed through the command chain. We can't afford to have the President hear on WNN what he should have heard from his Secretary of Defense," Stellmon explained. "That should about do it. Oh, I'd like to dry run the briefing in a week."

#### WNN

Joni Tonelli watched the latest video Bernie Kemp sent from Sudan prior to its airing on the next Global Update program. Thousands of Sudanese demonstrated outside the UN military headquarters, cursing America and its "murdering G.I. Joes." The demonstrations had been almost nonstop for two days, with crowds swelling and becoming increasingly violent during daylight hours. The noise of the screaming, shouting mass of humanity sounded like a wild animal on the verge of losing control. Joni thanked her lucky stars she was in Richmond.

#### THE WHITE HOUSE

The Secretary of State and the National Security Advisor left the Oval Office. The US military pullout from Sudan would begin next week; President Hardy would announce it tomorrow during his monthly press conference. The President reflected on how little control he had over events and comparatively, how much control the media seemed to have. He felt like a puppet...him, the most powerful man in the world. He stared at the screens of the three muted television sets, each one abruptly shifting from other news to lead into a Sudan update. He saw, in triplicate again, the disturbing image of a young American soldier dangling from the end of a red, white and blue rope.

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